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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



[The Editor is not responsible for opinions expressed in this Department.]

AN OPEN DOOR

DEAR EDITOR: It is inspiring to read in *THE JOURNAL* of the progress of nursing, in new lines at home and abroad. Those of us who remember its small beginnings can but marvel that in a generation it has grown to be a true "world power." May a humble member of the sisterhood suggest that there is a great opportunity open to us of which very little is said?

It is well to cure the sick and to care for the helpless wrecks in almshouses and hospitals, but it is better to prevent illness and poverty. As teachers of hygiene we are doing a great preventive work in preaching the gospel of cleanliness, pure food and fresh air, but we seldom see mention of our duty toward the greatest of all dietetic errors, the use of alcoholic drinks, yet it is largely the underlying cause of both the "white" and the "black plague," and of other evils too numerous for mention. The matter has so long been viewed from a moral and social standpoint that its plain physical basis has been largely overlooked.

The medical profession is now practically a unit in the opinion that alcohol acts as a poison on the healthy system and leads to the deterioration of every vital organ. A large, and rapidly increasing number of advanced thinkers and investigators go farther and hold that it is of no value in disease, but simply muffles the danger signal, by making the patient unconscious of the pain, while the disease goes on unchecked. In proof of their statements they bring an array of statistics of recoveries under non-alcoholic treatment that merits careful reading.

The medical use of alcohol is certainly declining, and the field to which it is applied is being constantly narrowed. When I was trained (1877-79) whiskey was freely given in phthisis and Bright's disease. Now it is counted to be contraindicated in both. The cold pack and fresh air are taking its place in pneumonia and typhoid, and so on. We may well hope that in the comparatively near future its use may, like bleeding, be looked upon as a relic of bygone days.

When that time comes and alcohol is banished from the medicine chest, it will soon vanish from the table. The foundation of its power

is the honest belief of good people that in moderate quantities it is healthful and medicinal.

Public interest is being widely aroused by the teaching of scientific temperance in the public schools. It is for us to supplement this teaching in the homes. The mission, district and school nurse have a free hand in this matter, for they are recognized teachers. The private nurse has a far more difficult field, for she is often looked upon as an employee who "must keep her place." In many houses practically nothing can be said, but the example of total abstinence, with the simple explanation that it is better for the digestion and general health, will rarely give offence. It may be smiled at in the parlor, but it will be carefully considered in the kitchen, and may save some poor girl from the glass that dulls her perception and leads to her ruin.

In multitudes of homes, especially of the great middle class, information will be gladly welcomed, if it is given from the dietetic standpoint, the physical side being emphasized. The faintest suggestion of possible inebriety is naturally resented, but no mother is insulted by the caution that beer or wine may injure her unborn or nursing child. There is no offense in explaining that alcohol taken with meal hardens the food and hinders digestion, the comfortable feeling it causes being narcotic and hiding the mischief it does, nor in pointing out that life insurance tables show the greater longevity of abstainers, nor in a whole army of other facts presented from an impersonal, scientific standpoint. Such presentation is as much within our sphere as advising about the care of babies' bottles.

It goes without saying that we must be loyal to our doctors. If they order liquors we must give them, however we may feel about it. But doctors will uphold us in objecting to the self prescription by their patients of alcohol or any other drug.

This letter must not be prolonged, but if any of the JOURNAL readers are enough interested to write to me, I will gladly put them in the way of getting further information along these lines.

ELLEN BERTHA BRADLEY, R, N.,
175 Halsey Street, Brooklyn, New York.

A NURSES' HOME

DEAR EDITOR: About three months ago, when on my way from Seattle to San Francisco, I stopped for a few hours at Portland, Oregon, and as I had heard of the beautiful home the nurses had there, I went to call. The home was built to suit the plans of Miss Lena G. Richardson,